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I

WHO WERE THE PURITANS?

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APART FROM NOSTALGIC PORTRAITS OF NEW ENGLAND PILGRIMS feasting with American Indians, the word *Puritan* typically conjures up images representing the worst sort of religious hypocrite. C. S. Lewis's demon Screwtape claims credit for this modern caricature in his correspondence to Wormwood, "The value we have given to that word [*Puritanism*] is one of the really solid triumphs of the last hundred years."[1] Yet history indicates that since the time of Shakespeare, Puritans were viewed as sexually repressed killjoys. In his comedy *Twelfth Night*, which first played in 1602, the playwright used the term to poke fun at Malvolio who squelched the mirth and merriment of others:

> Maria: Sir, sometimes his is a kind of Puritan.
> Sir Andrew: Oh! If I thought that, I'd beat him like a dog.
> Maria: The devil a Puritan that he is, . . . so crammed, as he thinks, with excellencies, that it is his grounds of faith that all that look on him love him.[2]

Two decades later the public image of Puritans had changed little when James I warned his son Charles:

> Take heed of these Puritans, the very pests (or plagues) of the Church and Commonwealth, whom no deserts can oblige, nor oaths, or promises bind; one that breathes nothing but sedition and calumnies. . . . He is a fanatic spirit; with whom you may find greater ingratitude, more lies, and viler perjuries, than amongst the most infamous thieves.[3]

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[1] C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (London: Mentor, 1988), pp. 38-39.
[2] William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night* (New York: Bantam, 1988), 2.3.139-52.
[3] Anonymous, *A Puritane Set Forth in His Lively Colours* (London: n.p., 1642), pp. 2-3.

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Many readers in the twenty-first century will fairly wonder why they should care about the Puritans. Were not the Puritans just some fanatical group that forced public religiosity without concern for authentic spirituality? Although an inaccurate stereotype, this misconception has had enduring power that is not easily set aside. In this book we hope to introduce readers to *real* Puritans, a wide variety of them, and to present them by looking at what they *really* said. This means becoming acquainted with some of their key writings. Our belief is that if readers develop a familiarity with a sampling of significant Puritan literature they will begin to have a much healthier and more accurate view of the Puritans, and this discovery could positively influence and challenge contemporary understandings of the Christian life. That does not mean we are arguing for an uncritical view of the Puritans; rather, we are hoping to cultivate an informed appreciation for this important, although often neglected, movement in the history of Christianity.

Before moving to the later chapters on particular Puritan classics some background is necessary. In this chapter we will begin by exploring the history of the name *Puritan*, since this title can mean so many different things to different people. From there we will give a brief history of Puritanism, covering roughly the period from the 1550s to 1700. This overview aims to help readers appreciate the historical and political soil from which Puritanism grew. We will next turn our attention to the idea of Puritan spirituality, arguing that amid the countless differences between the various Puritans there are some unifying features: we shall argue for a cluster of characteristics to fairly describe the Puritans in general. Once readers are familiar with this basic material, we believe they will be equipped to interact thoughtfully with some Puritan classics.

THE NAME *PURITAN*

Taking into consideration the comments noted above of Lewis, Shakespeare, and Charles I, we now turn to a fuller consideration of the word *Puritan*. Since some applied this term to those considered notorious separatists like the Anabaptists and Brownists,[4] Henry Parker in 1641 warned that "if the confused misapplication of this foul word Puritan be not reformed in England, . . . we can expect nothing but a sudden universal downfall of all goodness."[5] Historian Patrick Collinson clarifies that the "hotter sort of Protestants" who were called Puritans in the Elizabe-

[4]Giles Widdowes listed ten kinds of Puritans, including "the Perfectist, the factious Sermonist, the Separatist, the Anabaptist, the Brownist, Loves-familist, the Precisian, the Sabbatarian, the Ante-disciplinarian, [and] the Presuming Predestinatist" in his tract *The Schysmatical Puritan* (Oxford: n.p., 1630), p. B2.

[5]Henry Parker, *A Discourse Concerning Puritans* (n.p., 1641), p. 57.

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than tabloids preferred to call themselves "the godly," "the faithful" or "God's elect."[6] Some wished to abolish the term *Puritan* altogether because of its pejorative connotations. Once the English revolution was underway others attempted to redefine the term as a worthy title for those patriotic nonconformists seeking to reform the church.[7]

In spite of the fact that few individuals ever boasted of being a Puritan, modern historians agree that Puritanism was a genuine movement that wielded considerable force within seventeenth-century England and New England. However, because the name *Puritan* had a variety of historical meanings, agreement on a definition of Puritanism has continued to be elusive.[8] As Basil Hall demonstrates with examples from Thomas Fuller (1508-1561) and Richard Baxter (1615-1691), prior to the English Civil War (1642-1648) the term *Puritan* applied to "restlessly critical and occasionally rebellious members of the Church of England who desired some modifications in church government and worship, but not . . . those who deliberately removed themselves from that Church."[9] However, this narrow definition technically excludes the New England-bound *Separatists* who settled Plymouth colony, along with other early Puritan sympathizers who chose exile in the Netherlands rather than compromise their religious convictions.[10]

Here we offer a more inclusive definition that fits a growing scholarly consensus. Puritans should not be limited strictly to radical Protestant nonconformists, but rather to a much broader movement of individuals distinguished by a cluster of characteristics that transcends their political, ecclesiastical, and religious differences.[11] Some who we include as Puritans in this collection of essays (e.g., Thomas

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[6]Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), pp. 22-28.

[7]For example see the anonymous *The Old Puritan, Godly, Honest, and Loyal* (London: n.p., 1642), and John Geree, *The Character of an Old English Puritan or Non-Conformist* (London: n.p., 1646).

[8]On the problems defining Puritanism see Basil Hall, "Puritanism: the Problem of Definition," in *Studies in Church History*, ed. G. J. Cuming (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1965), 2:283-96; Lawrence A. Sasek, *Images of English Puritanism: A Collection of Contemporary Sources 1589-1646* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), pp. 1-27; Peter Lake, "Defining Puritanism: Again?" in *Puritanism: Trans-Atlantic Perspectives on a Seventeenth-Century Anglo-American Faith* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1993), pp. 3-29; and John Spurr, *English Puritanism 1603-1689* (London: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 1-27.

[9]Hall, "Puritanism: the Problem of Definition," p. 290.

[10]William Bradford clearly includes the Plymouth colonialists among those (e.g., William Perkins) who were called Puritans in his *History of Plymouth Plantation 1606-1647*, ed. Samuel Eliot Morrision (New York: Random House, 1952), p. 7. For information on the Dutch Second Reformation (*De Nadere Reformatie*) and how it fits into a discussion of Puritanism, see Joel R. Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), pp. 286-309.

[11]See for example Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales, "Introduction: The Puritan Ethos, 1560-1700," in *The Culture of English Puritanism 1560-1700*, ed. C. Durston and J. Eales (London: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 1-31 and Spurr, *English Puritanism 1603-1689*, pp. 28-45.

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Boston and Jonathan Edwards) lived long after the age of Puritan dissent had ended with the *Act of Toleration* in 1689. Yet they exhibited in their lives and ministries the same distinctive mindset, vibrant spirituality, and dynamic religious culture of their Puritan forebears. Similarly, although Richard Baxter and John Owen could have significant theological differences on how best to understand the atonement and justification, there is no debate that both men are rightly considered leading Puritans. Any proposed definition must also be flexible enough to affirm real differences that existed among those who are in some way represented by this name. For our purposes John Spurr comes closest to defining the "essence of Puritanism."

> It grows out of the individual's conviction that they have been personally saved by God, elected to salvation by a merciful God for no merit of their own; and that, as a consequence of this election, they must lead a life of visible piety, must be a member of a church modeled on the pattern of the New Testament, and must work to make their community and nation a model Christian society.[12]

Though these marks are primarily theological, and we will return to such common characteristics later, we cannot neglect the historical narrative from which they arose. Although Puritanism sprung from a matrix of religious, social and political events in sixteenth-century Europe, we will begin with the arrival of the Protestant Reformation in England.

A Brief History of Puritanism (1558-1700)

Protestant ideas from Wittenberg spread rapidly throughout Europe, reaching England during the reign of Henry VIII (1509-1547).[13] The English monarch used the pretense of religious reform as an opportunity to break with the Catholic Church so he could legally divorce, remarry and hopefully produce a male heir. During the short reign of his sickly son Edward VI (1547-1553), the theology of Luther and Calvin was introduced into the English Church by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556) through his book of *Homilies* (1547), his *Book of Common Prayer* (1552), and his *Forty-Two Articles of Religion* (1553). However, these reforms were quickly reversed during the "bloody" reign of Mary Tudor (1553-1558). She reinstated the Latin mass and enforced English allegiance to the Roman pope at the cost of 270 Protestant martyrs, including Thomas Cranmer.

When Queen Elizabeth (1533-1603) came to the throne in 1558, many who had fled to Europe in order to escape persecution under Mary returned to England

[12]Spurr, *English Puritanism 1603-1689*, p. 5.
[13]See Carl R. Trueman, *Luther's Legacy: Salvation and the English Reformers 1525-1556* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994).

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with hopes of continuing the reforms begun under Edward VI. Though the Queen appointed some of the "Marian exiles" to positions of influence (including six bishops), many felt that her *Acts of Uniformity* (1659-1662) left the Church only "half reformed," since she failed to rid England of the clerical vestments and ceremonies remaining from Catholicism. Her demand for strict observance of Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer* and *Articles of Religion* did little to satisfy their longing for the sort of biblical preaching they had experienced in the great Reformed churches on the continent. Horrified by the immoral and incompetent clergy tolerated by the English episcopacy, Thomas Cartwright (1535-1603) convinced many through his Cambridge lectures in 1570 that the road to reform required the more disciplined Presbyterian model practiced in Geneva. By 1586 a *Book of Discipline* began to circulate quietly among concerned ministers; it outlined new patterns for public worship that insured the preaching of the Word and proper administration of the sacraments.

Once the Queen overcame the international threat of Catholicism by defeating the Spanish Armada in 1588, she turned her attention again to reinforce conformity within the English Church. Her new Court of High Commission under Archbishop John Whitgift (1530-1604) suspended hundreds of clergy, accusing them of sedition and disloyalty in her *Act Against Puritans* issued in 1593.[14] Some of the ejected ministers continued preaching in lectureships sponsored by sympathetic Puritan gentry while a few began to gather congregations in private homes. Although Elizabeth successfully ended any organized efforts to reform the Church, a "spiritual brotherhood" of reform-minded moderates continued to flourish. Collinson explains that this was especially true in Cambridge where students flocked to hear the sermons of William Perkins (1558-1602), the "prince of Puritan theologians." During his ministry at Great St. Andrews Church, Perkins kept the university press busy printing his books on Reformed theology and practical divinity that were eagerly read throughout England. Equally influential was Laurence Chaderton (1538-1640), the "pope of Cambridge Puritanism," who for nearly forty years as master of Emmanuel College trained many of the most talented Puritan preachers of the next generation.[15]

Since James I (1566-1625) was a Calvinist, his accession to the throne in 1603 revived Puritan hopes for further reforms. Denying accusations that they were

[14]See *Documents of the Christian Church*, ed. Henry Bettenson, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 242-43.

[15]On the importance of Cambridge to the growth of Puritanism, see Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), pp. 122-30.

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"schismatics aiming at the dissolution" of the English Church, the Puritan brotherhood presented their requests to the new king in *The Millenary Petition* (1603), which was signed by a thousand ministers. They appealed for changes in the administration of baptism and use of vestments, the need for self-examination before Communion, the replacement of absent bishops with clergy able to preach and greater restraint by the ecclesiastical courts in excommunicating laypersons and suspending ministers.[16]

In 1604 James I held a conference at Hampton Court to consider their requests. However, recognizing that his royal supremacy was tied to the English episcopacy, James openly declared his fears: "No bishop, no king." Although he agreed to produce a fresh translation of the Bible to assist English preachers (the King James Version), he demanded that all clergy conform to the liturgy and government of the Church of England. To insure this, the king began a new campaign to impose ceremonial conformity through his bishops. From 1604 to 1609 nearly ninety ministers were suspended from office, including John Robinson (1575-1625), who migrated to the Netherlands with fellow separatist William Bradford (1589-1657), the future governor of Plymouth colony. In 1609 William Ames (1576-1633) was also ejected from Cambridge University and fled to the Netherlands where he became one of the greatest Puritan theologians.

After these initial suspensions, James I grew more tolerant toward Puritan pastors due to pressure from sympathetic members of Parliament.[17] Tensions were further eased by the king's support of Calvinism at the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) and by a growing number of moderate Puritans who found ways to compromise in order to continue their service within the English Church. They were led by Laurence Chaderton, who continued as master of Emmanuel College until 1622, and Richard Sibbes (1577-1635), who served as preacher at Holy Trinity Church in Cambridge and later at Gray's Inn in London. Sibbes's moderate stance on ecclesiastical matters allowed his popularity as a preacher to grow even during the contentious reign of King Charles I (1625-1640).[18]

Charles's marriage in 1625 to Henrietta Maria, a devout Catholic, sparked immediate fears among Puritan ministers and Parliament that the new king intended to lead England back to Rome. Suspicions grew when Charles appointed his

[16]"The Millenary Petition (1603)" in *Documents of the Christian Church*, ed. Henry Bettenson, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 282-84.
[17]Spurr, *English Puritanism 1603-1689*, p. 61.
[18]Mark E. Dever, *Richard Sibbes: Puritanism and Calvinism in Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2000), pp. 27-85.

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trusted adviser, William Laud (1573-1645), as the bishop of London in 1628. Although Laud opposed the authority of the pope, his reintroduction of many Catholic forms of worship and support of Arminian theology distressed the Puritan clergy. After Charles dissolved Parliament and assumed personal rule in 1629, Bishop Laud unleashed a bitter persecution of Puritans. He prohibited the preaching of predestination, required all clergy to use the prayer book and clerical dress, and made the laity kneel while receiving Communion. After his appointment as archbishop of Canterbury in 1633, Laud opposed the Puritan observance of the sabbath by demanding that the *Book of Sports* be read from every pulpit upon threat of suspension.[19]

Hounded by Laud's agents, many Puritans chose to emigrate either to the Netherlands or to New England. In 1630, John Winthrop (1588-1649) led the first great Puritan exodus to Massachusetts aboard the *Arbella* (with Simon and Anne Bradstreet) as part of a seven-ship flotilla. During the next decade, some of the most esteemed preachers in England, including John Cotton, Thomas Hooker and Thomas Shepard joined more than thirteen thousand emigrants who sailed to New England.[20]

The escalation of Laud's repressive tactics in 1637 proved disastrous for King Charles. His barbaric treatment of Puritan nonconformists like William Prynne (1600-1669), whose ears were cut off and face branded with hot irons, brought back memories of the brutal persecutions against Protestants under Queen Mary.[21] Laud's attempt to enforce Anglican liturgy on the Scottish Presbyterians galvanized their national resistance leading to their adoption in 1638 of the *National Covenant* that affirmed the Reformed faith and freedom of the Church in Scotland. The king's failed war against the Scottish "Covenanters" and his refusal to work with Parliament incited more opposition, ultimately forcing Charles to flee London in May 1642. In league with the Scottish Presbyterians and with the support of the Puritan clergy, the Long Parliament rejected Charles's claim of the divine right of kings, plunging the country into civil war. Charles and his cavalier army proved no match for the brilliant leadership of Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) and his New Model Army of Puritan soldiers. Parliament arrested Archbishop Laud and executed him for treason in 1645. After the defeat of the Roy-

[19] *The Book of Sports,* first issued by James I in 1618, encouraged dancing and recreation on Sundays. See *Documents of the Christian Church,* pp. 284-86.

[20] See John Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England 1558-1689* (Harlow, England: Longman, 2000), pp. 125-30 and Spurr, *English Puritanism 1603-1689*, pp. 86-93.

[21] On Prynne's persecution and public sentiment leading to the Civil War, see William Lamont, *Puritanism and Historical Controversy* (Los Angeles: UCLA Press, 1996), pp. 16-25.

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alists, Charles negotiated from prison a secret treaty with the Scots that led to further hostilities. For his role in prolonging the civil war, the king was tried and executed on January 30, 1649.

Throughout the English Civil War (1642-1648), under the direction of Parliament, over one hundred Puritan leaders assembled at Westminster Abbey to draft a new confession of faith for the national Church. Although they generally agreed on Calvinistic theology, differences arose between the majority who advocated a national Presbyterian Church, and a small but vocal minority of Independents, led by Thomas Goodwin, who argued for the right of congregations to govern themselves. They finally reached a compromise that advocated the voluntary formation of congregational presbyteries throughout the country. The Church of Scotland immediately approved the *Westminster Confession* upon its completion in 1647, followed by Congregationalists in New England in 1648. A decade later, English Congregationalists meeting in London adopted the Westminster Confession in their *Savoy Declaration* (1658) with only minor modifications on church government.[22] Thus, the Westminster Confession became the doctrinal standard for Puritan theology.

In spite of the great achievement at Westminster, any semblance of solidarity among nonconformists quickly disappeared with the end of the monarchy. After the creation of a new Commonwealth, the political tensions between Presbyterians and Independents in Parliament continued to escalate. To avoid political gridlock Cromwell dissolved Parliament in 1653 and ruled the country as Lord Protector until his death in 1658. Cromwell's guarantee of religious freedoms allowed unprecedented growth among nearly all religious sects. Independents were promoted to positions of great power within the Puritan Commonwealth. John Owen, for example, was appointed vice chancellor of Oxford, a former royalist stronghold. Unfortunately the new religious freedoms were short lived. Richard Cromwell's failed attempt to succeed his father created a complex political crisis that precipitously led to the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. In spite of promises by Charles II to preserve liberty of conscience, Anglican loyalists driven by revenge pressured the king to restore religious conformity through a series of acts known as the Clarendon Code (named after Lord Chancellor Edward Hyde, earl of Clarendon).

Thus began the period of dissent that resulted in the persecution and imprisonment of many famous Puritan pastors, including John Bunyan and Richard Bax-

[22]See *Documents of the English Reformation*, ed. Gerald Bray (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), pp. 521-42.

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ter. In 1662 the *Act of Uniformity* required Puritan ministers to repudiate their denominational ordinations, renounce their oath to the *Solemn League and Covenant*, and be reordained under the bishops.[23] Nearly two thousand ministers (a fifth of all the clergy) refused to conform and were ejected from their parishes on St. Bartholomew's day, August 24, 1662. The *Conventicle Act* in 1664 banning nonconformists from preaching in the fields or conducting services in homes was followed in 1665 by the *Five Mile Act*, which prohibited ejected ministers from coming within five miles of their former parishes or any city or town.

Although Puritans were barred from the pulpits and universities, the repressive measures could not silence their pens. After 1662, under the shadow of persecution, they produced some of their most cherished devotional and theological works (e.g., *Pilgrim's Progress*). Although the hopes of a Puritan commonwealth continued to flicker in New England, the strength of Puritanism was quickly fading in old England. Sadly, most of the leading Puritans died before the lifting of persecution in 1689 by the *Toleration Act* under William and Mary. Banned from English churchyards even after their death, many Puritans, including John Bunyan, Thomas Goodwin and John Owen, were buried in a special nonconformist cemetery in Bunhill Fields, London. By the end of the century, much of the Puritan passion to reform the Church of England was redirected into the forming of various dissenting denominations then lawfully permitted by the English government.

Puritan Spirituality

The history of Puritanism illustrates the fact that Puritans were not of one mind on ecclesiastical issues, for they included Anglicans (e.g., William Perkins, Richard Sibbes), Separatists (e.g., William Bradford), Independents (e.g., Thomas Goodwin, John Cotton and John Owen), Presbyterians (e.g., John Howe and Thomas Watson) and Baptists (e.g., John Bunyan). Neither could Puritans agree on such doctrines as the eternal decrees of predestination, for they included Dortian Calvinists (e.g., John Owen and Thomas Goodwin),[24] moderate Calvinists (e.g., Richard Baxter),[25] and even a few Arminians (e.g., John Goodwin).[26] Furthermore the Puritans did not share a common sociopolitical

[23]See *Documents of the English Reformation*, pp. 546-59.

[24]These included Puritans who affirmed particular redemption along with total depravity, unconditional election, irresistible grace and perseverance of the saints as expressed in the canons adopted at the Synod of Dort (1618-1619).

[25]On Baxter's "moderate Calvinism" see Dewey D. Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology 1525-1695* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), pp. 132-40.

[26]Foremost among those sectarians sympathetic toward the views of Jacob Arminius was John Goodwin (1594-

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agenda, for loyalists as well as revolutionaries were numbered among their ranks. Consequently historians have often focused on the varieties within Puritanism.[27] However, here we offer a cluster of characteristics that describe the overall ethos that united the various theological, political and ecclesiastical streams of Puritanism. Each characteristic builds on another and should be seen as necessarily interrelated with the others, since all in some way represent core Puritan values and beliefs.

First, *many understand Puritanism as a movement of spirituality.* William Haller stressed that Puritans were foremost a "brotherhood" of preachers detailing the spiritual life for their listeners.[28] Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe affirms, "The rise of Puritanism [in] New England ought to be understood as a significant episode in the ongoing history of Christian spirituality."[29] E. Glenn Hinson simply declares "Puritanism was spirituality."[30] The variety of "spiritualities" in postmodern society requires we clarify that we refer here to a *Christian* spirituality that seeks a deeper awareness of God's presence as defined by the Christian faith according to the Bible.[31] Although the term *spirituality* was not in vogue among the Puritans, their emphasis upon daily communion with Christ, energized by the Spirit and guided by a biblically ordered set of beliefs and values, includes all the essential elements of a truly Christian spirituality.[32] This is particularly true of Puritanism during the period following the bitter civil war and in light of the theological debates of the Puritan revolution. Dewey Wallace explains that following 1660, "The piety and spirituality that had always been at the core of Puritanism . . . now [became] the point of concentration for the still-considerable Puritan energies."[33] The funda-

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1665), who denied predestination, particular redemption and irresistible grace, though he practiced the same piety and commitment to reform the English Church as other Puritans. Wallace also includes John Milton among the "sectarian Arminians" because of his statements in his *De Doctrina Christiana*. See Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, pp. 130-32.

[27] See Leonard J. Trinterud, ed., *Elizabethan Puritanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 9; H. C. Porter, ed. *Puritanism in Tudor England* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1971), p. 10; and Jerald C. Brauer, "Types of Puritan Piety," *Church History* 56:1 (1987): 39-58.

[28] William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), pp. 49-82.

[29] Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), p. 25.

[30] E. Glenn Hinson, "Puritan Spirituality," in *Protestant Spiritual Traditions,* ed. Frank C. Senn (New York: Paulist, 1986), p. 165.

[31] On defining s*pirituality* in light of its postmodern usage see D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), pp. 555-69.

[32] On defining "Christian spirituality" according to "a set of beliefs and values" expressed as "a way of life," see Alister McGrath, *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 1-5.

[33] Dewey D. Wallace Jr., *The Spirituality of the Later English Puritans: An Anthology* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1987), p. xiii.

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mental nature of spirituality within Puritanism is found in its insistence that the converted soul must go beyond conversion to actual holiness of life. This preoccupation with growth and progressive sanctification is often described in terms of a pilgrimage, as illustrated by John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), a work that J. I. Packer ably discusses later in this book.[34] The Puritan concern with a growing spirituality toward personal holiness cannot be overstated, and this naturally takes us to the next characteristic.

Second, *Puritanism, at its heart, lays stress on experiencing communion with God.* Richard F. Lovelace states, "Recent scholarship has increasingly concluded that throughout most of its history English Puritanism can best be understood by examining its predominating stress on Christian experience."[35] Geoffrey Nuttall defines Puritanism as "a movement towards immediacy in relation to God,"[36] and Charles Hambrick-Stowe describes it as "a devotional movement, rooted in religious experience."[37] "The practical bent of the Puritans," says Leland Ryken, "led them to emphasize the experiential nature of the Christian faith."[38] For the Puritan, intellectual assent to Christian doctrine had to be balanced with the practical outworking of God's grace in life experiences.

This was commonly expressed by the Puritan term *experimental*, which meant "experiential." Thomas Shepard (1605-1649) wrote, "Saints have an experimental knowledge of the work of grace, by virtue of which they come to know it as certainly . . . as by feeling heat, we know that fire is hot; by tasting honey, we know it is sweet."[39] "Experience is the life of a Christian," declared Richard Sibbes (1577-1635).[40] John Bunyan (1628-1688) explained that he preached "what I felt, what I smartingly did feel."[41] James Maclear notes that this stress upon experience which "sounded again and again in Puritan sermons, diaries, biographies, and guides to

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[34]Hambrick-Stowe regards the pilgrimage theme as "the principle metaphor running through Puritan spirituality" (*The Practice of Piety*, p. 54).

[35]Richard C. Lovelace, *The American Pietism of Cotton Mather: Origins of American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Christian University Press, 1979), p. 36.

[36]Geoffrey Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience,* 2nd ed. (London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 134.

[37]Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety,* p. vii.

[38]Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), p. 214. See also Gordon Rupp, "A Devotion of Rapture in English Puritanism," in *Reformation, Conformity, and Dissent: Essays in Honour of Geoffrey Nuttall*, ed. R. Buick Knox (London: Epworth, 1977), p. 120.

[39]Thomas Shepard, *The Parable of the Ten Virgins Opened and Applied* (1659; reprint, Morgan, Penn.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1990), p. 222.

[40]Richard Sibbes, *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (1862-1864; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), 4:412.

[41]John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666; reprint, London: SCM Press, 1955), p. 124.

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the spiritual life, attained its climax in the conversion experience, which was not an ornament but a norm of the religious life."[42] Hence, rather than being merely interested in an intellectual knowledge of theology or the outward observance of a moral code, the Puritans were united in their commitment to integrate their personal experience of God into their daily living.

Third, *Puritans were united in their dependence upon the Bible as their supreme source of spiritual sustenance and guide for the reformation of life*.[43] They based this commitment on their belief that the Bible was the inspired Word of God. "Think in every line you read that God is speaking to you," said Thomas Watson.[44] For John Owen, "The whole authority of the Scriptures . . . depends solely on its divine original [*sic*]. . . . The Scripture hath all its authority from its Author."[45] Puritans further reasoned that biblical authority was absolute because of the infallibility of Scripture. Concerning the human authors of Scripture, William Ames stated, "Only those could set down the rule of faith and conduct, who . . . were free from all error because of the direct and infallible direction they had from God."[46] According to Richard Baxter, the apostles wrote "without errors,"[47] and for John Owen the Bible was "a stable, infallible revelation of [God's] mind and will."[48] However, the Puritans were concerned with far more than the infallibility of the Bible.

Puritan preachers stressed the need for their listeners to cultivate an intense appetite for the Scriptures. "Feed upon the Word," John Cotton told his congregation.[49] Richard Baxter implored his readers to "love, reverence, read, study, obey and stick close to the Scriptures."[50] The Puritan conviction that the Bible was the source of spirituality is evidenced in their commitment to a vernacular Bible available to all literate Christians. This was initially expressed by their use of the *Geneva Bible* produced by Protestant exiles during the reign of Queen Mary in 1560, but ultimately realized in the production of the Authorized Version under King James

[42]James Maclear, "The Birth of the Free Church Tradition," *Church History* 26 (1957): 101.

[43]For a helpful overview of the Puritan view of the Bible, see Allen Carden, "The Word of God in Puritan New England: Seventeenth-Century Perspectives on the Nature and Authority of the Bible," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 18 (1980):1-16; and Brian G. Armstrong, "Puritan Spirituality: The Tension of Bible and Experience," in *The Spirituality of Western Christendom*, vol. 2, ed. E. Rozanne Elder (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1984), pp. 243-48.

[44]Thomas Waston, *A Body of Divinity* (1692; reprint, London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), p. 25.

[45]John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, 24 vols. (1850-1855; republished, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965, 1991), 16:297, 309.

[46]William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology* (1629; reprint, Boston: Pilgrim, 1968), pp. 185-86.

[47]Richard Baxter, *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*, ed. William Orme (London: J. Duncan, 1830), 20:115.

[48]Owen, *Works*, 14:273.

[49]John Cotton, *Christ the Fountaine of Life* (London: n.p., 1651), p. 134.

[50]Baxter, *Practical Works*, 22:239.

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I in 1611. The Puritans not only originated the idea of a new translation, but they also played a prominent role in its actual publication, for half of the committee of fifty-four translators were Puritan scholars.[51]

Their commitment to a biblically based spirituality can further be seen in their emphasis upon the spoken and written sermon as a means to communicate and meditate upon the Scriptures.[52] Chaderton called their style "a plain but effectual way of preaching."[53] Ideally the Puritan preacher's aim was not to impress listeners by their wit and learning, but rather to relate biblical truth to everyday life. This required not only the careful study of Scripture but also a perceptive understanding of human nature. They spoke of themselves as "physicians of the soul" who sought to apply the medicine of the Bible to the wounded consciences and broken hearts among their congregations. Puritan spirituality was supremely rooted in the Bible.

Fourth, *the Puritans were predominantly Augustinian in their emphasis upon human sinfulness and divine grace*.[54] Few have challenged Perry Miller's claim that Puritanism was primarily a manifestation of "the Augustinian strain of piety."[55] Augustine's restless path toward conversion and meditative purging of heart and soul eloquently recounted in his *Confessions* is echoed throughout numerous Puritan autobiographies and personal journals. But more importantly, Puritans followed Luther and Calvin's emphasis on an Augustinian view of human depravity that requires God's gracious initiative to work out salvation in the human heart. In his discussion of original sin in *The Golden Chaine* (1591), William Perkins (1558-1602) declared:

> The will received an impotence whereby it cannot will, or so much as lust after that which is indeed good, that which may please and be acceptable to God; . . . an inward rebellion whereby it utterly abhorreth that which is good, desiring and willing that alone which is evil. By this appeareth that the will is no agent, but a mere patient in the first act of conversion to God and that by itself it can neither begin that conversion, or any other inward and sound obedience due to God's law.[56]

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[51]Ralph Barton Perry, *Puritanism and Democracy* (New York: Vanguard, 1944), p. 238.

[52]On the importance of preaching to Puritan spirituality see J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1994), pp. 277-89, and Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 3-64.

[53]Cited by John Adair, *Puritans: Religion and Politics in Seventeenth-Century England and America* (Gloucestershire, England: Sutton, 1998), p. 92.

[54]Against Pelagius, Augustine (354-430) declared that, with the Fall, man lost the ability to do good apart from God's grace (see Augustine *The Spirit and the Letter* 4-11). Hence, Augustine affirmed man's need of divine grace both to believe and obey God's commands (see Augustine *Enchiridion* 30-32, 106-7; *Confessions* 10:29-30, 37).

[55]Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (1939; reprint, Boston: Beacon, 1961), pp. 4-5.

[56]William Perkins, *A Golden Chaine* (Cambridge: John Legate, 1591), p. 29.

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The human inability that requires God's grace is stressed in the Westminster Confession (1647):

> Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good; and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto. When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, he freeth him from his natural bondage under sin, and by his grace alone enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good.[57]

The Puritan stress on human inability led to their emphasis upon the necessity of God's gracious renovation of human nature. By his Spirit, God equips the redeemed person with the power to live righteously. Thus John Cotton concluded, "That there be in all such as are effectually called and united unto Christ, in-dwelling spiritual gifts of grace, wrought and created in us by the Holy Spirit, that is, by the begetting whereof, we are begotten and renewed to a spiritual life unto God, and so become fit members of his Church."[58] This need for regeneration became a dominant theme within Puritan spirituality. For example, Thomas Goodwin wrote, "There are inwrought and infused in the soul at regeneration, inherent and abiding principles of spiritual life, by which the soul is inwardly fitted, capacitated, inclined, and quickened unto the operations of a spiritual life."[59] Similarly, John Owen described regeneration as

> the infusion of a new, real, spiritual principle into the soul and its faculties, of spiritual life, light, holiness, and righteousness, disposed unto and suited for the destruction or expulsion of a contrary, inbred, habitual principle of sin and enmity against God, enabling unto all acts of holy obedience.[60]

Therefore, Puritan spirituality was rooted in an inner renewal that empowers the soul with spiritual life, but this could only be understood in light of the Spirit's activity.

Fifth, *the Puritans placed great emphasis upon the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life*. Richard Baxter declared that since the Holy Spirit is "our Guide, and Sanctifier, and Comforter," the doctrine of the Holy Spirit "is a most practical article of our belief."[61] There can be no doubt that for the Puritans reflection on the Holy Spirit was essential—not accidental—to understanding the Christian life.

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[57]See *Documents of the English Reformation*, p. 595.
[58]John Cotton, *The Covenant of God's Free Grace* (London: n.p., 1645), p. 27.
[59]Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, ed. Thomas Smith (1863; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), 6:187. See also Stephen Charnock, *The Doctrine of Regeneration* (1840; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980).
[60]Owen, *Works*, 3:218-19.
[61]Baxter, *Practical Works*, 1:69.

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B. B. Warfield, the brilliant Princeton theologian writing in 1900, made the startling comment that "the developed doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit is an exclusively Reformation doctrine, and more particularly a Reformed doctrine, and more particularly still a Puritan doctrine."[62] Although one can argue that Warfield's case is overstated, he nevertheless does rightly acknowledge just how clearly Puritans focused on the Spirit's activity. Although this may surprise many who assume the Puritans were rationalists with no concern for the Spirit, nothing could be further from the historical truth. Geoffrey F. Nuttall, one of the most respected scholars of Puritanism in the twentieth century, made the point without hesitation: "the doctrine [of the Holy Spirit], with its manifold implications, received a more thorough and detailed consideration from the Puritans of seventeenth-century England than it has received at any other time in Christian history."[63]

Consistently Puritan pastors and theologians found themselves diving afresh into explorations of the person and work of the Spirit, for here they found insight into how faithfully to shepherd the people of God. The Holy Spirit's critical role in sanctification was rooted in the Puritan belief that all spirituality resulted from the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, for the Puritans, the Spirit's work became the manner through which spirituality was initiated by God as an act of divine grace. Through the chapters of this book the reader will encounter creative ways in which the Puritans sought to have their thinking informed by a high view of the Spirit. Their interest in the work of the Holy Spirit is evidenced by a number of lengthy treatises written on the subject, the greatest of which were Thomas Goodwin's *The Work of the Holy Spirit in Our Salvation* (1663)[64] and John Owen's *Pneumatologia: A Discourse on the Holy Spirit* (1674).[65]

Sixth, *the Puritans were deeply troubled with sacramental forms of Catholic spirituality fostered within the Anglican Church.* They vigorously spoke out against what they labeled as "popish" forms of piety, regarding them, according to Richard Lovelace, "as a kind of rust to be scrubbed off the church rather than as furniture for its devotional life."[66] For example, speaking against the influx of Roman Catholic devotional practices into England, Henry Burton (1578-1648) wrote:

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[62]B. B. Warfield, introduction to Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Henri De Vries (London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1900), p. xxxviii.
[63]Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit*, p. xxviii.
[64]Goodwin, *Works*, 6:1-522.
[65]Owen, *Works*, 3:1-651.
[66]Richard C. Lovelace, "Puritan Spirituality: The Search for a Rightly Reformed Church," in *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern*, ed. Louis Dupré and Don E. Saliers (New York: Crossroad, 1989), p. 296.

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> There is as well a Devotion blind and superstitious, breathed from the Bottomlesse-pit by him, who can transforme himself into an Angel of Light: as a Devotion illuminate, and truly religious, like Elias his Sacrifice, inspired and inflamed by Fire from Heaven. Nor doth the Old Serpent either so usually or effectually infuse his poysonous enchantments into men's minds, as when he propineth them in the Golden Cup of demure Devotion. . . . What rabbles and swarmes of vowed disciples did these two, St Francis, and St Dominicke draw after them, and all by the strong incantations of their deepe Devotion.[67]

This critique of Anglo-Catholic piety is also evident in John Owen's rejection of the vows, orders, fastings and penances of "popish religion" as the "mistaken ways and means of mortification."[68] For it was "such outside endeavours, such bodily exercises, such self-performances, such merely legal duties, without the least mention of Christ or his Spirit" that inspired Owen to publish his treatise *On the Mortification of Sin in Believers*.[69] Thus the Puritan enthusiasm to promote a spirituality that was biblical must be seen in part as an attempt to counteract the various elements of Catholic piety found within the Church of England.

Seventh, *Puritanism can also be understood as a revival movement*. J. I. Packer strongly emphasizes this by asserting, "spiritual revival was central to what the Puritans professed to be seeking." Packer defines revival "as a work of God by his Spirit through his word bringing the spiritually dead to living faith in Christ and renewing the inner life of Christians who have grown slack and sleepy."[70] He bases his definition of Puritanism as "a movement of Revival" on three evidences. The first is that, although "revival" is not commonly found in their writings, Puritans repeatedly used the terms *reform*, *reformation* and *reformed*, to express the inward renewal of the heart and life that they sought to promote. The Puritans urged rulers "to reform their countries,"[71] citizens to promote "the reformation of religion,"[72] and fathers "to reform families."[73] When Richard Baxter published his classic work on the ministry, *The Reformed Pastor* (1656), his purpose was not to encourage pastors to be

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[67]Henry Burton, *A Tryall of Private Devotions* (1628; reprint, Norwood, N.J.: Walter J. Johnson, 1977), p. C-1, quoted in Lovelace, "Puritan Spirituality," p. 297.

[68]Owen, *Works*, 6:16.

[69]Ibid., 6:17.

[70]Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, pp. 36-37.

[71]See the preface of the *Geneva Bible* addressed "To the Most Virtuous and Noble Queen Elizabeth" (1560) in *Documents of the English Reformation*, ed. Gerald Bray (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), p. 358.

[72]"The Solemn League and Covenant, 1643," in *Documents of the English Reformation*, ed. Gerald Bray (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), pp. 483-84.

[73]The promise made by the church of Dorchester in 1677 according to the records of the First Church in Dorchester (Boston, 1891), p. 19, quoted in Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, p. 36.

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Calvinistic in doctrine, but rather to be "renewed in vigour, zeal and purpose, in other words [be] *revived*."

The second evidence is that "personal revival was the central theme of Puritan devotional literature."[74] The vast number of printed sermons, manuals for godliness, treatises on conversion, and autobiographies written by the "affectionate practical English writers" substantiates this claim.[75]

Packer's third evidence that Puritanism must be considered a revival movement is that "the ministry of Puritan pastors under God brought revival."[76] He illustrates this by contrasting the faithful ministry of Richard Greenham from 1570 to 1590, which "was virtually fruitless," with the revivalistic nature of Richard Baxter's ministry in Kidderminster from 1641 to 1660 (during the Puritan revolution), where most of the two thousand adults in town "were converted under his ministry."[77] This reveals that sometimes revival did come as a result of Puritanism in England. Hence, as Wallace suggests, the "evangelical revivals of the eighteenth century" should not be regarded "as a new departure after generations of religious deadness," but rather as "continuations of [the] seventeenth-century . . . revival of spirituality" among the Puritans.[78] This is an argument Richard Lovelace will build upon in the final chapter of this book, which focuses on the Puritans and spiritual renewal.

Let us review the cluster of characteristics we have highlighted above:

- Many understand Puritanism as a movement of spirituality.
- Puritanism, at its heart, lays stress on experiencing communion with God.
- Puritans were united in their dependence upon the Bible as their supreme source of spiritual sustenance and guide for the reformation of life.
- The Puritans were predominantly Augustinian in their emphasis upon human sinfulness and divine grace.
- The Puritans placed great emphasis upon the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life.

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[74]Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, pp. 38-39.

[75]Richard Baxter, *Baxter's Practical Works* (1673; reprint, Ligonier, Penn.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1990), 1:732. After stating that the "poorest library" must include a Bible, concordance, a "sound commentary" and "some English catechisms," Baxter concluded with the names of some sixty works, all but three of them written by Puritans.

[76]Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, p. 42.

[77]Ibid., p. 43-44.

[78]Wallace, *Spirituality of the Later English Puritans*, p. xii.

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- The Puritans were deeply troubled with sacramental forms of Catholic spirituality fostered within the Anglican Church.
- Puritanism can also be understood as a revival movement.

These seven characteristics avoid blurring the theological, political and ecclesiastical differences that existed among Puritans while capturing their ethos of renewal and personal piety. The works introduced in this collection of essays are *Puritan* because each one reflects threads of a common spirituality that emphasized Christian experience and promoted corporate revival based upon the preaching of the Bible and wrought by the Holy Spirit.

A Puritan Classic

We have sought to define the meaning of *Puritan* both historically and theologically. However, we feel that the best way to experience the essence of Puritanism is through reading its classic texts. If a *classic* is a work of enduring popularity to all generations, few of the works we have selected in this book would qualify. With the exceptions of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, most of the classics introduced here were selected more because of their neglect than their familiarity, although almost all of the volumes included have been reprinted numerous times since their original publication. Each classic included in this book has served and nourished previous generations in ways that offer great promise for generations to come. Contemporary neglect of these volumes should not disqualify them from requiring the attention they deserve.

Contemporary debates rage regarding the questionability of there being such a thing as a canon of Western literature, that is, an agreed upon set of texts every educated reader should be familiar with. Educators have become keenly aware of the difficulty of selectivity and bias.[79] Nevertheless it seems fair to suggest that one of the tasks of a scholar is to read widely, find some of the very best literature and then suggest a distilled list of texts worthy of the layperson's time. With this in mind, in this book we invite you to discover the Puritans and some of what we consider to be their most significant literary contributions. Ultimately it is you the reader who will determine which of these texts are truly classics when you read them for your own enrichment. This is certainly true of the contributors to this book, for in each case the work they introduce is, in some sense, a personal classic in their own lives.

[79] See, for example, the differing views represented by Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), esp. pp. 15-39, and Lillian S. Robinson, "Treason Our Text: Feminist Challenges to the Literary Canon," in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon, 1985), pp. 105-21.

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Our primary intention here is to encourage you to read the original works for yourself. However, we also realize that Mark Twain's quip that a classic is what "everyone wishes they have read but never takes the time to read" will remain true for many. It is for this reason that many of the chapters, especially those dealing with the more difficult to read volumes, spend so much time surveying the actual work. Although a person may not have the time to read the thousands of pages represented in these classics, simply reading *The Devoted Life* may lead in the right direction. For those unable to read the original texts, this collection of essays offers access to a vast treasure of Puritan wisdom and theology that would remain otherwise out of reach.

The process of selecting texts proved difficult because of the numerous works that could have been included. Many other Puritan works qualify as classics, including William Gurnell's *Christian in Complete Armour*, Stephen Charnock's *Existence and Attributes of God* and John Preston's *The Saints' Daily Exercise*, just to name a few. Our selection was an attempt to provide examples of works on various themes throughout the history of Puritanism.

There are certain difficulties encountered when reading classic texts from centuries past. The following essays attempt to neutralize some of these difficulties by introducing the authors within their historical contexts in ways that illumine their goals. Often an understanding of the original circumstances will help guide modern readers in not only understanding the author's meaning, but also determining how to apply it to modern life. Because of the change of times and circumstances, we should not presume that we must agree with every point of Puritan authors in order to benefit from their message. Yet we believe that none of these Puritan classics should be preserved only for the academic elite. We have selected these classics because they have proven to be helpful, stimulating, encouraging or challenging to many who have taken the time to read them. After you read through this volume, you might choose to read a few of the original Puritan works that captured your imagination. We suspect that the more you read of the original texts, the more you will find the Puritans as healthy dialogue partners for understanding the Christian faith and life in our own day.

C. S. Lewis memorably noted the "mistaken preference for the modern books and this shyness of the old ones is nowhere more rampant than in theology."[80] This was the opposite of how it should be, argued Lewis, since "old books" not specifically addressed to us may speak more powerfully to our own day because they are

[80] C. S. Lewis, "On the Reading of Old Books," in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 201.

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not bound by the same cultural blinders. We can do no better than to listen to Lewis powerfully make his case.

> None of us can fully escape this blindness [of our age], but we shall certainly increase it, and weaken our guard against it, if we read only modern books. Where they are true they will give us truths which we half knew already. Where they are false they will aggravate the error with which we are already dangerously ill. The only palliative is to keep the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds, and this can be done only by reading old books. Not, of course, that there is any magic about the past. People were no cleverer then than they are now; they made as many mistakes as we. But not the *same* mistakes. They will not flatter us in the errors we are already committing; and their own errors, being now open and palpable, will not endanger us. . . . To be sure, the books of the future would be just as good a corrective as the books of the past, but unfortunately we cannot get at them.[81]

We must avoid being engaged in what has been called "chronological snobbery," in which we assume our age has the correct perspective. Reading from different generations allows us to see what was previously hidden, and the best way to avoid darkness is to turn on the lights. May this volume be the switch that illumines the world of the Puritans for you.

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[81] Ibid., p. 202.

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